New York
Theatre Critics' Reviews
1955

Volume XVI, Number 10 • Rachel W. Coffin, *Editor* • Week of April 25, 1955

1955 PRODUCTIONS
Premieres in Other Years
Original Reviews Appeared In These Volumes

Stage Play	1954 Vol.	*Page*
*Anastasia		192
*Anniversary Waltz		339
*Bad Seed (The)		223
*Boy Friend (The)		299
Caine Mutiny Court Martial (The)		382
Dear Charles		316
*Fanny		256
Flowering Peach (The)		196
*House of Flowers		189
*Lunatics and Lovers		219
Mrs. Patterson		231
*Pajama Game (The)		324
Peter Pan		273
Quadrille		259
Rainmaker (The)		264
Reclining Figure		294
Saint of Bleecker Street (The)		199
Sandhog		239
Tender Trap (The)		282
Wedding Breakfast		243
What Every Woman Knows		208
*Witness for the Prosecution		216
	1953 Vol.	
*Can-Can		304
Kismet		198
Solid Gold Cadillac (The)		222
*Tea and Sympathy		266
*Teahouse of the August Moon (The)		254
	1952 Vol.	
*Seven Year Itch (The)		186
	1951 Vol.	
Fourposter (The)		190

**Asterisks indicate shows scheduled to play week of April 25, 1955*

1955 PRODUCTIONS
Premieres During 1955
Reviews Appear in This Volume

Stage Play	*Page*
*All in One	325
*Ankles Aweigh	329
*Bus Stop	346
*Cat on a Hot Tin Roof	342
*Champagne Complex	334
Dark Is Light Enough (The)	357
*Desperate Hours (The)	370
Doctor's Dilemma (The)	397
Festival	393
Grand Prize (The)	385
*Inherit the Wind	322
Master Builder (The)	349
*Plain and Fancy	382
*Silk Stockings	354
Southwest Corner (The)	374
*3 For Tonight	337
Time of Your Life (The)	390
Tonight in Samarkand	365
Wayward Saint (The)	362
Wisteria Trees (The)	377
CRITIC'S CIRCLE AWARD	340

Theatre Openings
"Ankles Aweigh"
"All in One" "Inherit the Wind"

**Asterisks indicate shows scheduled to play week of April 25, 1955*

Theatre Critics' Reviews brings you each week the complete reviews as they originally appeared in these New York newspapers.

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK POST
NEW YORK MIRROR
NEW YORK WORLD TELEGRAM & THE SUN
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK TIMES

All Reviews copyrighted by the newspapers and reproduced by permission.

Yearly Subscription $25.00

Published by CRITICS' THEATRE REVIEWS, Inc., 235 East 22nd Street, New York 10, N. Y.

"Inherit the Wind"

New York Post

April 22, 1955

By Richard Watts Jr.

A Drama About a Celebrated Case

Out of the celebrated Scopes "monkey" trial of the middle twenties, where two titans of the period named Clarence Darrow and William Jennings Bryan fought out a battle between the precepts of Darwin and the literal interpretation of the Old Testament, while the case of the young teacher being tried for telling his students about evolution was virtually forgotten, Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee have made a play called "Inherit the Wind." Excellently acted by Paul Muni and Ed Begley as the warring advocates, it opened last night at the National Theater, and I think it provides a steadily absorbing evening of drama.

As I recall the news stories of the day, the authors have, on the whole, followed the facts of this curious episode in our annals quite factually. Taking advantage of their dramatic privileges, they have called Darrow Henry Drummond and Bryan Matthew Harrison Brady, been a bit free-and-easy with the character of H. L. Mencken, killed off Bryan prematurely at the end of the trial, and given the young teacher a romance, but, in general, they have been true enough to history.

Trial and Circus

Among other things, the trial was a flamboyant show, with its colorful giants of the law in combat, its odd atmosphere of lurid fantasy, and the small Southern town turned into a combination of traveling circus and hysterical religious revival meeting, and the authors have naturally taken advantage of all this to indicate the wild picturesqueness of the spectacle. They wouldn't have been true to the spirit of the occasion if they hadn't. But they are also concerned with the philosophical implications of this factual nightmare interlude.

This being a day not unknown for its own heresy trials, the playwrights have naturally seen certain parallels with the time of Darrow, Bryan and Scopes, but they have wisely not pushed them too heavily. The danger of trying men for unorthodox beliefs that another age may accept is present by suggestion, but it is always in the background, as I think it should be. It is possible that the outrageousness of trying to jail a man for teaching the theory of evolution might otherwise falsely give us the idea that we have progressed farther in such matters than we really have.

Good Man Gone Wrong

Although the play is frankly partisan in its viewpoint, it is admirably fair to the man who is actually its villain. I believe it is sound in showing Bryan as absurdly narrow and small-minded in his actions at the trial, but nonetheless a man who possessed goodness of heart, an innate decency and a tragic quality of fine instincts gone wildly wrong through his inner weakness of bigotry. Actually, "Inherit the Wind" is at its least effective in its philosophical moments, but its dramatized chronicle is vivid, pertinent and always interesting.

Mr. Muni is at his best in the symphathetic role of Darrow, since his instinct for pictureque detail fits so well into an autentically colorful character. Mr. Begley admirably shows both the fatuousness and wistfulness of Bryan, and Karl Light and Bethel Leslie are excellent as the teacher and his confused sweetheart. I thought Tony Randall was more humorous than credible as the Mencken character. He was no more successful than are most actors at suggesting that he might be a distinguished writer. Herman Shumlin's staging and Peter Larkin's set are enormously helpful. "Inherit the Wind" is an effectively provocative chronicle drama.

"INHERIT THE WIND"

Play by Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee; staged by Herman Shumlin; settings by Peter Larkin; lighting by Feder; costumes by Ruth Morley; presented by Mr. Shumlin in association with Margo Jones at the National Theatre, April 21, 1955. The cast:

Rachel Brown.....Bethel Leslie
Meeker.....Robert P. Lieb
Bertram Cates.....Karl Light
Mr. Goodfellow...Salem Ludwig
Mrs. Krebs.....Sara Floyd
Rev. Jeremiah Brown.....Staats Cotsworth
Corkin.....Fred Herrick
Bollinger.....Donald Elson
Platt.....Fred Miller
Mr. Bannister..Charles Thompson
Melinda.....Mary Kevin Kelly
Howard.....Eric Berne
Mrs. Lommis.....Rita Newton
Hot Dog Man.....Howard Caine
Mrs. McClain..Margherita Sargent
Mrs. Blair.....Ruth Newton
Elijah.....Charles Brin
E. K. Hornbeck....Tony Randall
Hurdy Gurdy Man...Harry Shaw
Timmy.....Jack Banning
Mayor.....James Maloney
Matthew Harrison Brady.....Ed Begley
Mrs. Brady.....Muriel Kirkland
Tom Davenport...William Darrid
Henry Drummond....Paul Muni
Judge.....Louis Hector
Dunlap.....Fred Miller
Reuter's Man....Edmund Williams
Harry Y. Esterbrook..Perry Fiske

DAILY NEWS

NEW YORK'S PICTURE NEWSPAPER

April 22, 1955

'Inherit the Wind' Is a Splendid Drama of Ideas, Superbly Acted

By JOHN CHAPMAN

The new play which opened last evening at the National Theatre, "Inherit the Wind," is one of the most exciting dramas of the last decade. It is superbly acted by a big company headed by Paul Muni and Ed Begley, faultlessly staged by Herman Shumlin, dramatically pictured by Peter Larkin, artfully lighted by Abe Feder. And, best of all, it has been magnificently written by Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee.

Because of legal niceties, I suppose, the place, characters and time of the drama are fictionalized, so that Muni appears as a character named Henry Drummond and Begley is called Matthew Harrison Brady. But Muni and Begley are, of course, Clarence Darrow and William Jennings Bryan, and the events at the National Theatre are a representation of what happened when these two notable men clashed in the historic Scopes "monkey trial" in Tennessee.

The Right to Think

This trial was a long while ago and it seemed more comic than historic at the time. A young teacher named Scopes was put on trial in a fundamentalist community for telling his pupils about Charles Darwin's theories on the origin of species. The issue was a serious one, but it was played for laughs across the nation as the newspapers sent such trained seals as phrasemaker H. L. Mencken and sportswriter W. O. McGeehan to cover it.

The authors of "Inherit the Wind" have followed the outline of the trial very closely and have not neglected its humorous aspects, but they have done much more than manufacture a documentary. They have made a play which, in addition to abundantly satisfying the desires of a theatregoer, stirs the mind. As Muni puts it, his young teachaer client is not on trial. "The right to think is on trial." Again he says, trying to comfort his discouraged young man before the verdict is delivered, "The loneliest feeling in the world is to find yourself standing when everybody else is sitting down."

The setting of "Inherit the Wind" seems to be, at the beginning, a dreary small-town courtroom, where the trial is about to begin. Suddenly there is a dramatic flood of light, and above and behind the courtroom are the houses and streets of the town itself, where the townsfolk come to welcome the great fundamentalist presidential aspirant who has chosen to prosecute the erring teacher. It is a rousing welcome, and by contrast the arrival of an attorney who has volunteered to defend the young man is a shuffling affair. When these two have come, the gage has been flung and the duel begins.

It is a thrilling duel, because it is a duel of ideas, and Muni and Begley fight it magnificently. Muni is slouching, seemingly casual but inwardly aflame with indignation. Begley is benign, pompous and honestly aflame with righteousness. The clashes between these two actors kept my spine atingle and my heart pounding most of the evening—and I did have time to admire several other performances, including those of Louis Hector as the trial judge, Karl Light as the teacher, Bethel Leslie as his girl, Staats Cotsworth as a fundamentalist minister and Tony Randall as a Menckenesque reporter.

This drama is fine theatre, and director Herman Shumlin has got every bit of it onto the stage. The title comes from one of King Solomon's proverbs: "He that troubleth his own house shall inherit the wind: and the fool shall be servant to the wise of heart,"

New York World-Telegram and The Sun

April 22, 1955

Play Builds '55 Moral On Darwin

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

The town has a hit that is distinguished and challenging in "Inherit the Wind" at the National.

This tidal wave of a drama is based on the famous Scopes trial about 30 years ago, in which Clarence Darrow and William Jennings Bryan tussled over a man's right to think.

A school teacher is charged with violating a state law when he read to his students Darwin's theory of evolution. The hearing becomes a world-famous circus. The story ends with a technical conviction. But the proceedings make a joke of the law.

Point Well Made.

More than any other play in memory based on history and aiming at a contemporary parallel, "Inherit the Wind" makes its points immediately applicable.

Words like "flivver" and "boob" identify the period. Then the conflict makes you wish it was all farther away. Public opinion here is the product of puny literal thinking.

The defense lawyer, unforgettably played by Paul Muni, fights for his principle with the razor-edged sword of ridicule. He bombards any literal reading of the Bible.

He cracks his opponent with an argument about the Creation. How long was a day, before there was any sun? 25 hours?

The great tragic orator, three time loser in Presidential races, succumbs literally to derision. His opponent wanders off to new fields, bearing with him the Holy Bible, and the Darwinian text of the scientist, back to back.

Fine Production.

It is a triumphant production that Herman Shumlin directs. There is the real feel of a hot little dozing village, where nobody wants to be irritated by open minds. The Peter Larkin set ably keeps the town above and around the courtroom through all the action.

Mr. Muni gives one of those rare performances of a lifetime as the defending lawyer. Chin down, shoulders round, belly forward, with a shock of white hair, he is a classic figure of the American courtroom.

As the satisfied prosecutor, broken in this last adventure, Ed Begley gives an extraordinary portrait of a man whose golden throat and his rejection by the public have turned him into a pompous shell. If there is any quarrel with the play, it is in this role's lack of full blooming rhetoric.

Tony Randall is bitterly casual as the iconoclastic reporter whose interest in the trial begins its fame. Muriel Kirkland is very real and touching as Mr. Begley's wife, and Staats Cotsworth has some terrifying moments as a hidebound preacher.

Karl Light is excellent as the defendant.

The New York Times

April 22, 1955

Theatre: Drama of the 'Monkey Trial'

'Inherit the Wind' Is Play Upon History

By LEWIS FUNKE

BY going to the pages of history—the history that was written in Dayton, Tenn., in 1925 with the colossal legal hippodrome known as the "monkey trial," authors Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee had two purposes in mind. The first was to write in their play, "Inherit the Wind," a moving drama of people caught in an intellectual ferment they did not completely understand; the second to remind us all once again that conformity and thought control are enemies of progress and enlightenment.

Although it has been said that men learn nothing from history except that they do not learn anything, Messrs. Lawrence and Lee are to be credited with having another try at showing up a segment of the past for future guidance. But in undertaking their venture they have bucked one of the great hurdles of the theatre. History already written is lacking in suspense and suspense is one of the vital elements of theatrical sustenance.

The characters in the play that opened at the National Thursday night are not called by the names of the real persons after whom they are fashioned. But it is impossible to dissociate them or not to know the course of the events in which they are involved. The consequence is a play that is only intermittently compelling.

•

Technically the issue in Dayton was entirely clear—an open and shut case as the lawyers say. A young schoolteacher—in real life named John T. Scopes, in the play, Bertram Cates—had dared to test a law written in the statute books of Tennessee. He dared to teach the Darwinian theory of evolution to his students. Arrested, he was brought to trial and William Jennings Bryan came to speak in behalf of the prosecution. The great trial lawyer, Clarence Darrow, was hired to handle the defense. The courtroom battle was rather one-sided and Darrow withered his rival with scorn and ridicule. But Scopes was convicted, a martyr to the cause of freedom.

All this and what went on in the town beyond the courtroom walls they have tried to encompass. They have tried to show the nature of the local citizens, their beliefs and dogmas. They have written taut and telling scenes as, for instance, when the pastor summons his flock to remind them of their allegiance to the fundamental word of the Scriptures. There is strength and power in the second act when Paul Muni, portraying the defense attorney, relentlessly hounds and reduces to gibberish Ed Begley, playing the role of Bryan. And there is a touching moment when Mr. Begley collapses in obvious but undaunted defeat.

Yet, though these episodes burn brightly they do not sufficiently make up for the overall lack of tension or the obvious moral, no matter how worthy, that "Inherit the Wind" is trying to convey. The clinical quality is not arrested by the eloquence of the words.

Credit Mr. Muni with a magnificent performance. As Henry Drummond, the infidel from Chicago, he has one of the acting plums of his career. Back in the theatre after a six-year absence, he is giving one of the superb portrayals of the season. Not a detail has been overlooked as he gets inside the character—the shuffling gait, the unpressed suit, the ruffled gray hair, the grimace in amazement, the cunning of the trial attorney, the booming, stentorian voice of the lawyer rushing in for the kill. When Mr. Muni is on the stage, "Inherit the Wind" is gripping and absorbing.

Ed Begley, as the upholder of the Bible, is fine, too. The hero of the people, sure and confident of himself, he is like a champion without a fear that his cause will triumph. But as he sits on the witness chair his defenses crumble, the ridicule cuts him to pieces and the anguish he suffers is moving, indeed.

•

Karl Light as the schoolteacher, does sincerely with the few brief moments he has to speak his lines. And Bethel Leslie, his sweetheart who out of her father's training must testify against him, is thoroughly effective. Staats Cotsworth is good as the reverend and Tony Randall, the cynical, iconoclastic, phrase-moulding newspaper man from Baltimore, is commendable.

More than fifty persons, one of the largest casts in recent memory, are in the play and Herman Shumlin has directed all of them with considerable skill. To achieve the effect of the courtroom and the town itself, Peter Larkin has devised a two-tier set that is immense, with the courtroom in the foreground and a raised street scene on the upper level replete with buildings and business establishments.

Indeed, nothing has been spared to frame and make this play live. The trouble is that it does not live sturdily enough.

NEW YORK Herald Tribune
April 22, 1955

THEATER

'Inherit the Wind'

By WALTER F. KERR

THERE'S a whale of an old-fashioned, free-swinging, suspender-snapping fight going on at the National, and Paul Muni wins it.

In "Inherit the Wind," the semi-documentary play that Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee have based on the Scopes "monkey trial" of 1925, Mr. Muni has one of those parts that actors have been known to hock their wives and children for.

Take his first entrance, for instance. The small country town of Hillsboro has just whooped up a roaring reception for another man—the silver-tongued orator who is going to prosecute a young schoolteacher for mentioning the subject of Evolution to his charges. The famed, fatuous, saintly-domed Matthew Harrison Brady has been greeted with banners, hallelujahs, and Eskimo Pies.

• • •

After awhile the crowd goes home, the streets thin out and the sun starts to set on Peter Larkin's golbin-haunted town. Only a newspaper man lounges against a hitching-post. And up the hill from the station comes Mr. Muni, unsung counsel for the defense—weary, puffing, mopping his neck, walking as thought there were holes in his shoes and the pavement were hot. In the twilight, the crusader has come. And Mr. Muni doesn't even have to say a word. The first curtain descends on his lonely image. How could you miss?

• • •

But, of course, you could miss—even after that. Mr. Muni doesn't. In the rich, raucous, rough-and-tumble second act in the courthouse, he gets hold of the role like a starved hound of magnificent ancestry and shakes it till the feathers fill the room.

With his iron-gray hair falling over his eyes, his lower lip jutting forward in speculative contempt and his violet galluses holding the rest of him together, Mr. Muni whispers genial insults, roars ironic objections, pouts and fiddles and glares and—sometimes—gives up. In every posture he is superb, and all the postures fit together. By the time he is through with the narrowness of the townsfolk, the ineptitude of the court and the gloating rhetoric of his pompous opponent, he has turned a long, racy, intricate monologue into pure thunder. It's a dazzling, and in every way delightful, tour de force.

• • •

There is help from the sidelines, too. Ed Begley does just the right thing with the Bible-chanting Matthew Harrison Brady. The part isn't too much more than a stereotype: an easy balloon to puncture. But Mr. Begley—looking very much like one's image of William Jennings Bryan—begins the evening with a smile that is truly genial, a suggestion of earnest simplicity beneath the grandstand manner. This leaves him somewhere to go: as Muni gets after him, the grin can gradually become shakier, alarm can well up from some personal depth.

And in the brief, flashy role of a boob-baiting Baltimore reporter, Tony Randall has the fanged tongue and the cynical eloquence to do more than justice to the play's best quips. A few of his longer flights seem almost to have been written out of the same rhetoric that the authors are elsewhere deriding, and the role thins out as bigger guns are brought up; but Mr. Randall himself is never caught napping.

• • •

An enormous company—much too numerous for individual mention this morning—stirs and buzzes with wasplike energy under Herman Shumlin's sharply focused direction. Mr. Larkin's setting—a miraculous double-decker that permits the ramshackle town to appear and disappear at will—is stunning both as a design and as a piece of extraordinarily useful machinery.

• • •

The writing itself seems a species of lively, not very dimensional journalism. Individual scenes crackle in the hands of the actors; but the construction is fairly random and the authors often reach after a kind of block-print melodrama. The Romeo-and-Juliet love story finds the daughter of a minister (in love with the heretic schoolteacher) screaming, clutching at an improvised pulpit, and falling at her father's feet during a prayer meeting. Bethel Leslie gives the role a believable intensity; but she has hard work to do. In pushing the courtroom scene so far as to leave the desperate Brady alone and deserted, still calling out the books of the Bible, the Messrs. Lawrence and Lee have reduced dramatic complexity to the rather primitive outlines of a political cartoon.

But this is not to deny the chalk-stroke vitality of the evening, or the steady fascination of the verbal battle. And Mr. Muni is obviously so happy he could sing.

Journal-American
April 22, 1955

Muni Superb In New Drama

Play of Monkey Trial Declared A Rare Experience in Theatre

By JOHN McCLAIN

HOLD UP YOUR COUNT, Mr. Auditor, we've got a whole flock of new votes for the best performance of the year. Paul Muni, returning to the stage after a long and unauthorized absence, has just brought in a large plurality for his superb delineation of Clarence Darrow in "Inherit the Wind," which opened at the National Theatre last night.

For here is one of those rare experiences in the theatre, a strenuous and engrossing drama dominated by a single actor. From the moment he shuffles into the town where the famous "Monkey trial" is to be held until the final curtain, when he puts the Bible and Darwin's theory of evolution back-to-back in his brief case and ambles off into the night, it is his evening.

50 in the Cast

In the meantime he slouches about the stage in his shirt sleeves, pushes out his belly, smacks his lips, musses his unruly hair; he whispers, rants and cajoles. There must be 50 people in the cast, but he is always in charge.

"Inherit the Wind," a new play by Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee, is according to my faint recollection, a rather faithful dramatization of the famous trial of the mid-Twenties in which a teacher in a small Tennessee town was indicted for teaching evolution in the local high school. William Jennings Bryan was chief counsel for the prosecution and Clarence Darrow was the lawyer for the defense.

The play takes us through the moments of high emotion which preceded the trial throughout the country, the fierce and hopelessly prejudiced battle Darrow was forced to wage against a hostile court, his eventual vindication with the verdict, and the tragic finale in the death of Mr. Bryan.

It seemed to me that most of this was handled with pardonable dramatic license and moments of brilliant eloquence. If the first two acts reach a climax which cannot possibly be matched in the third, it may be excused on the grounds that the events of history did not, unfortunately, provide a punch finish like "Witness for the Prosecution." And if the love story meanders and flounders it can be dismissed likewise as something which had small connection with the factual case.

Set Lauded

Otherwise the play is a most thoughtful and stirring experience. The production is intricate and bountiful; the single set in two levels, revealing the courtroom and the main street of the town, is a tribute to the ingenuity and taste of Peter Larkin. Herman Shumlin has directed with a true and powerful hand.

In the large cast Ed Begley gave a startlingly lifelike impersonation of Bryan (here

called Matthew Harrison Brady); Tony Randall scored effectively in the role of a sophisticated reporter, and other solid contributions were turned in by Bethel Leslie, Muriel Kirkland, Staats Cotsworth, Louis Hector and Karl Light.

But in the final analysis it's Muni all the way.

Daily Mirror

April 22, 1955

'Inherit the Wind' Full Of Drive, Suspense, Color

By ROBERT COLEMAN

"Inherit the Wind," which Herman Shumlin and Margo Jones brought to the National Theatre Thursday evening, is a re-creation of the famous Scopes trial that took place some years ago. The instructor, convicted of violating the law by teaching the theory of evolution, is now known as Bertram Cates.

WILLIAM JENNINGS Bryan, who prosecuted the young Darwinian, has become Matthew Harrison Brady. And Clarence Darrow is now known as Henry Drummond. The contest between religious fundamentalism and science is told with an exciting dramatic touch, irony and humor that is alternately kindly and biting.

The most gripping scene in the play is that in which the relentless Drummond drives Brady to collapse in the witness chair. It is magnificently played by Paul Muni, as the gallus-snapping, paunchy and clever defense attorney, and Ed Begley, as the victim of his searching cross-examination.

Tony Randall is excellent as a breezy, cynical newspaper reporter from Baltimore, who, on behalf of his sheet, pays the fine imposed on Cates. There are other admirable contributions by Karl Light, Muriel Kirkland, Bethel Leslie, Staats Cotsworth and Louis Hector.

SHUMLIN HAS staged the Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee script with a sure hand. Peter Larkin has designed another of his fine settings. Downstage is the courtroom, with a drab, small-town street behind it. This permits fluidity, and obviates waits for scene changes.

The new arrival is at its tense best dufing the trial episodes. These hold the interest in a vise-like grip. It is something like that memorable one in "The Caine Mutiny Court Martial." It has drive, suspense and color. Technically, it is exciting theatre.

"Inherit the Wind's" appeal is doubtful, though. It is likely to offend many of the truly devout, and please advocates of evolution. For it is a plea for what the authors consider to be truth and the right to teach it in our schools. Now that this purpose has been accomplished we can only wonder how many playgoers will care to watch the events that helped make it possible.

"All in One"

New York World-Telegram and The Sun

April 20, 1955

'All in One' Sets Fast Pace

By WILLIAM HAWKINS

"All In One" is a rare novelty at the Playhouse. This adds up to supervaudeville. It promises endless future variations. I hope it becomes a permanent part of the Broadway scene.

There is plenty of contrast in the opening bill. A wry and comical little operetta by Leonard Bernstein, a dance series by Paul Draper, and a tragicomic one-act play by Tennessee Williams.

It is Maureen Stapleton in this last item, "27 Wagons Full of Cotton," who most makes the show astounding. She plays a silly young Southern wife, bullied, beaten, betrayed and made a traitor in 24 hours.

It is a gordid little story, and could be a sinister and unpleasant one without Miss Stapleton's ingenious playing. She makes the young woman such a feeble sensualist, such a lolling plaything of fate, and so unconsciously funny that her case becomes an awakening rather than a tragedy.

Eloquent Feet.

She is all plump smiles and foolish grunts and giggles. She also acts with more eloquent feet than anyone has since Laurette Taylor played "Outward Bound."

Myron McCormick is the coarse and scheming husband, and Felice Orlandi the sadistic interloper. Each gives the picture solid dimensions.

Mr. Bernstein's "Trouble in Tahiti," which opens the bill, is an unusual work. It is a satire, tender and biting in turn, on the ideal suburban, high-standard, middle class life in America and the sad boredom it can engineer.

It is the simple picture of a married couple who have everything their hearts desire except durability of romance. Toward each other they feel guilt, tenderness and irritation.

Escape To a Movie.

The title refers to a movie to which they escape. The high point of the musical interlude is Alice Ghortley's hilarious description of the motion picture she claims to despise.

Trying on a series of wild hats, she traces the reels inch by inch. John Tyers as her handsome athletic husband has a fine soliloquy about his own impressions of society, and his place in it.

Mr. Draper offers his witty, graceful dances between the other two productions. In his present program he sticks more to narrative and abstract or classic works. These suit the mood of the evening, as he gracefully clicks them off.

Welcome Try.

The producing team of Bowden and Barr is trying a difficult and welcome sort of entertainment with "All In One." There are endless works and endless artists who could be seen to advantage under these circumstances.

The premier bill sets a provocative pace. If other bills have on them anything approaching the Stapleton performance, they should prove shining magnets.

"ALL IN ONE"

Production of a triple bill of plays and dances including "Trouble in Tahiti" by Leonard Bernstein and staged by David Brooke; Paul Draper in a series of dances, accompanied by John Colman; and "27 Wagons Full of Cotton" by Tennessee Williams and directed by Vincent J. Donehue. Settings and lighting by Eldon Elder, costumes by Pat Campbell, presented by Charles Bowden and Richard Barr at the Playhouse Theatre, April 19, 1955, with the following players: Alice Ghostley, John Tyers, Maureen Stapleton, Myron McCormick and Felice Orlandi.

Daily Mirror

April 20, 1955

'All in One' Opens Here At the Playhouse

By ROBERT COLEMAN

Charles Bowden and Richard Barr brought a blend of music, dance and drama to the Playhouse Tuesday evening. The hybrid entertainment, titled "All in One," is an attempt to achieve variety and novelty. There is a little of everything and not much of anything. It's less than a tonic for a hot and clammy evening.

Major interest centered on Tennessee Williams' one-acter called "27 Wagons Full of Cotton." It is about cruel and stupid people. It is a re-telling of the kind of story that Boccaccio wrote in terms of old-fashioned vaudeville. It might appeal to those who relish the baiting of bears or inmates of Bedlam.

A VICIOUS HUSBAND burns down a syndicate's cotton gin, and gets the business for his own small plant. But the representative of modern methods has his revenge through the arsonist's moronic wife. It's a sadistic dip into depravity, about on the artistic level of "Tobacco Road."

Maureen Stapleton is wonderfully accurate as the wife, whose late father had described her as "not very bright." Myron McCormick is equally perfect as the husband who slips over a fast deal at the expense of honor. And Felice Orlandi is good as the knowing superintendent who puts horns on his adversary.

Modern opera has its innings via "Trouble in Tahiti," which you may have seen on television a while back. It is Leonard Bernstein's musical depiction of a bored couple who seek escape through the movies, psychiatry and golf. Like the characters in Williams' opus, they are not very bright, either.

ALICE GHOSTLEY, a versatile **artist, is rather fascinating as the wife who dreams of hectic events in the tropics, and has a high old time of trying on hats that would scare the devil out of the eminent Mr. John. She has an excellent voice and a delightful, satiric comedy touch.**

John Tyers, who used to grace our opera and operetta stages, is admirably cast as her Babbitt-like spouse, immersed in business and sports. Making the best of a dull existence. A four-piece orchestra and a vocal trio lend them able support.

Like Menotti's "The Telephone," "Trouble in Tahiti" is a voluble work. Where Menotti had a gabby gal, Bernstein has a gabby gal and guy. It's loaded with musical small-talk, alternately innocuous and amusing. It's one of those things we can take or leave. And we'd rather leave it.

• • •

PAUL DRAPER demonstrates his mastery of taps mated to balletic style in the middle of the program. He ranges from the classic to the comic. He even offers a monologue or two. We prefer him when he steps rather than talks. For he's more eloquent with his feet.

David Brooks staged "Trouble in Tahiti," and Vincent J. Donohue "27 Wagons Full of Cotton." Eldon Elder and Pat Campbell have designed serviceable settings and costumes for them.

"All in One" is an arty and pretentious venture in showmanship. It makes us wonder when our composers and dramatists are going to get around to dealing with mentally-stimulating people. We're getting fed up with the frustrated, petty, quarrelsome and sub-normal. What the Fabulous Invalid needs is excitement and intelligence.

Journal American

April 20, 1955

Engrossing Theatre

New Idea in 'Intimate' Drama Proves Singularly Entertaining

By JOHN McCLAIN

CHARLES BOWDEN and Richard Barr, about whom I know very little, have done the local theatrical scene a distinct service in initiating a fresh approach to the so-called "intimate" drama. They kicked off last night with three one-act efforts, displayed under the collective title, "All In One," at the Playhouse Theatre. It is a diversified and thoroughly engrossing evening all around.

The curtain-raiser is a musical drama by Leonard Bernstein involving only two principals, a singing trio, and an offstage double piano and percussion combination. The trio sets the stage with a swingy number echoing the delights of life in a white cottage in Suburbia, U.S.A.

Utterly Charming

And then with Alice Ghostley and John Tyers, we follow in solo and duet the fretting and fractious life of the occupants of the dream house. Beginning with breakfast on an average day we see them through bust-up and make-up, the petty involvements with pride and frustration and, finally, the reunion back home at night.

This is utterly charming. Alice Ghostley uncorks an exceptionally true and workable voice; John Tyers is personable and equally gifted and the Bernstein score is delightful.

Miss Ghostley will absolutely flatten you with her reconstruction of the movie she's seen in the afternoon, "Trouble in Tahiti." Eldon Elder's sets for the seven scenes are bright and imaginative.

The next item on the program is a solid standby involving the single services of Paul Draper, the dancer. Most of us have seen him many times before, doing just about the same things, but as in the case of anybody who does any one thing better than anybody else it is always a pleasure and, in a strange way, a new experience each time we return. For instance, I had never seen him do "Satire on a Political Speech," a number without words or music, and I thought it was superb.

The last act, the big finish, is supplied by Tennessee Williams, the author, and Maureen Stapleton and Myron McCormick, the players, in a very short and incisive drama called (in the true Williams manner) "27 Wagons Full of Cotton."

For me, at least, this is the sort of thing at which the author excels: it is constantly hilarious, yet with an understanding of the sinister undercurrents involved.

McCormick, a poor cotton gin owner, is married to Maureen, a semi-imbecile many years his junior. In his financial desperation Myron sets fire to the cotton gin of the Syndicate Plantation next door and, as a result, gets an order to process 27 wagons full of cotton at his own gin. Trouble is, the young super of the Syndicate gets wise and pursues the "good neighbor" policy by attacking Maureen while Myron is busy with the 27 wagons.

Miss Stapleton is captivating as the skittish and vapid Southern belle and Mr. McCormick is suitably blowsy and unregenerate as her scheming spouse. Felice Orlandi (who, it develops, is Miss Ghostley's husband) is a most decorative and muscular attacker. Again Mr. Elder has run up a simple and workable set.

This struck me as a singularly entertaining evening in the theatre; if you don't like most of this one you just aren't trying.

New York Post

April 20, 1955

By Richard Watts Jr.

A Drama, an Opera, and a Dancer

You wouldn't be far wrong if you called "All in One" a crazy, mixed-up evening in the theater. The oddly assorted program that opened last night at the Playhouse consists of an old but characteristic one-act play by Tennessee Williams with the title of "27 Wagons Full of Cotton," a short satirical opera by Leonard Bernstein known as "Trouble in Tahiti," and a brief dance recital by the talented Paul Draper. We drama critics are being forced to become versatile fellows, but it is quite possible I should have shared the reviewing with my colleagues of music and the dance.

Because it is the item that belongs most securely in my specialized territory, as well as the one which interested me most, I'll begin with Mr. Williams' little contribution, although it is the last number on the bill. I suspect it is among its author's distinctly minor achievements, but it is likewise entirely typical of his mood, manner and spirit. There is in it that disturbing combination of explicit sex and implied sadism which has become his particular preserve. And there is also present that familiar quality of ugly fascination.

The Wife

"27 Wagons Full of Cotton" is the rather studiously distasteful tale of a blowzy, half-idiotic childwoman of a wife, her corrupt husband who sets fire to a cotton gin, and the Italian manager of the cotton plantation, who uses his knowledge of the crime to force the husband to accept his seduction of the wife. It is all given over to an unpleasantly gloating observation of the unfortunate woman's imbecilic frailties and her entrapment by the Italian, but I'd be indulging in hypocrisy if I denied that it held my uncomfortable interest throughout.

In large part this fascination is the result of an astonishingly brilliant performance by Maureen Stapleton as the wife. Miss Stapleton doesn't mind emphasizing the utter foolishness of the woman or the role's leeringly comic aspects, and yet she succeeds in making the part utterly believable, honestly pathetic and even strangely touching. I think it is the finest portrayal I have ever seen this admirable actress give, and one of the season's best. The other roles are well played by Myron McCormick as the husband and Felice Orlandi as the Italian.

The Opera

We are certainly on more cheerful ground when we turn to "Trouble in Tahiti." Mr. Bernstein's short opera is a satirical tale of a suburban husband and wife who are not getting along any too well. The title, by the way, is that of a movie the wife sees, and Alice Ghostley's hilarious account of the film's imbecilities is the high point of a bright and engaging little musical narrative. I thought Miss Ghostley was quite splendid and she is ably assisted by John Tyers as her athletic husband and Constance Brigham as the distaff section of a chorus of three.

Everyone knows that Mr. Draper is a dancer who possesses style and imagination. I liked him best in a dance hall interlude and in a medley of styles accompanying music that ranges from "Pinafore" to a few blues numbers. Last evening he cut his repertory short in the interest of speeding up the slightly delayed program, but there was enough to demonstrate that he is a performer of high distinction. "All in One" is a curiously assembled entertainment that may cover too wide a range of interests. And maybe Mr. Williams' play isn't exactly entertainment. But it does exert that uncomfortable spell of his.

Herald Tribune

NEW YORK

April 20, 1955

THEATER

'All in One'

By WALTER F. KERR

TWO interesting actresses have a fine time for themselves in the new triple-bill at the Playhouse. The Messrs. Bowden and Barr have decided that 48th Street and environs could very well stand an intimate theater devoted to collections of short pieces—the kind that are simply too fragmentary to be turned into full evenings—and for their curtain-raiser, Leonard Bernstein's "Trouble in Tahiti," they have snared Alice Ghostley from her customary mimicry in musical revues.

• • •

Here Miss Ghostley, who once came to attention doing a Boston beguine in a moth-eaten sweater, is cast as an unhappy matron in the waste land of suburbia. Her husband won't talk to her at breakfast, complains because the toast is burnt, prefers to work out in a local gym rather than go to the school play, and hates to pay mama's psychiatry bills.

The piece itself, a capsule opera in seven scenes bridged by a narrative trio that sings bop, is of two minds about its intentions. It tees off on a grim, caustic scratchy note calculated to send half of Westchester flying back to the big city brownstones. It is lugubrious not only about suburbia, but about trivia—and a good bit of the early anguish seemed to me seriously out of proportion to the burnt-toast circumstances.

• • •

The musical structure builds, though, and the attack alters. Husband John Tyers gets to sing, a wryly satirical, and not all bad-humored, paean of praise to the "men who win out." Almost immediately thereafter his distracted wife turns up in a hat shop, absently trying on unsuitable bonnets as she recapitulates the dreary movie she has just seen.

It is at this point that Miss Ghostley comes into her own. The passion that has hitherto been spent on her self-pitying loneliness now splits wildly into two directions: into blistering contempt for the Technicolor world she has come out of, and into a wonderfully mechanical re-living of its most torrid situations. The singer flashes from one mood to the other with both the grace and force of lightning, with blissful command and a lunatic comic instinct. She promptly gets "Trouble in Tahiti" out of trouble.

• • •

Maureen Stapleton is the girl with the showy opportunities in "27 Wagons Full of Cotton," a fifteen-year-old Tennessee Williams vignette that foreshadows nearly all of the author's virtues. Miss Stapleton sashays onto one of those shuttered front porches with a beadwork screen door and a fly-specked overhead light, all dolled up in severely organdie—with her slip showing—and eager to go to a fire. Her much older husband won't let her go to the fire because he has secretly set it.

When this lightheaded chatterbox innocently betrays him to a visiting supervisor, Mr. Williams' permanently mendacious universe strikes one of its ugly ironic balances: the supervisor will keep the secret of the fire provided he is given the freedom of the family bed. The arrangement is silently accepted.

Miss Stapleton's portrait of a garrulous imbecile is perfectly warm and extremely funny. Sitting with her heels keeled over, dawdling on a swing, obediently parroting her husband's suggestions, giggling and then trembling in alarm as the conspiracy catches up with her, she cagily treads the narrow line between caricature and bathos.

• • •

She gets hearty support from Myron McCormick—perhaps not quite ideally cast—as the hard-worked Blue Mountain man who has a shrewd eye for business but a careless one for his household belongings. And Felice Orlandi is properly insinuating as the visitor with a riding-crop in his hand and a gleam in his eye. The company as a whole may be over-exploiting the comedy of the early scenes, considering the point the play is going to make; but the open laughter does have the merit of giving the evening its promised variety.

• • •

Between playlets there is Paul Draper—spare, fastidious, inventively agile—to do a pin-drop improvisation on Handel's "Alcina Suite," a gum-chewing foray into a 49c dance-hall, a political-rally satire in which his feet take care of the rhetoric and a dash of "Tea for Two" in derby and bow-tie. Mr. Draper is in excellent form.

These diversified entertainments—handsomely and inexpensively backed up by some Eldon Elder set-pieces—do not necessarily constitute a breath-taking evening. But "All in One" is consistently interesting, and it provides a comfortable home for some wandering miniatures.

The New York Times
April 20, 1955

Theatre: 'Trouble in Tahiti,' Draper, '27 Wagons'

By BROOKS ATKINSON

THANKS for an evening of superb theatre art, "All in One," they call it, and it was put on at The Playhouse last evening.

In point of fact it is a program of three different items: Leonard Bernstein's brooding opera "Trouble In Tahiti," several dances by Paul Draper and a performance of Tennessee Williams' "27 Wagons Full of Cotton"—all of them art, all of them well acted and staged.

Although Mr. Draper comes second on the program, let's put him first as an artist. Several years have elapsed since this theatregoer has seen Mr. Draper dancing. But they must have been the years when he was working at a medium that seems limited in scope but now has great virtuosity and beauty.

•

He is a tap dancer. He can tap as jauntily as the next man in his humorous pieces, like the Youmans' "Tea for Two" and the Porter tunes for the sardonic, fantasticated "In a Dance Hall." But even in these idiomatic sketches there is a lightness of style that is very much his own. And his four dance forms to Handel's "Alcina Suite" are sensitive, illuminating and fine art. Tap-dancing may be a limited form. But Mr. Draper is an imaginative artist who does not recognize limitations. Call it the triumph of an indomitable man who has made his medium sing, shine and dance.

Mr. Bernstein's miniature opera looks under the immaculate surface of life in the suburbs. To set the popular cultural standard, he begins with some radio crooning that expresses banal advertising slogans about happiness, health and success. The main sequences of the opera, however, make a serious attempt to explore the minds of a young husband and a young wife whose lives have become empty.

In the space of a half hour, Mr. Bernstein cannot exhaust the subject. But musically, as well as intellectually, "Trouble in Tahiti" is a sober, thoughtful look into life that is sleek only on the surface. The two chief parts are sung and acted beautifully. As the young husband, John Tyers is first-rate—suave without being slick, but troubled and reluctant. And Alice Ghostley, who was singing that comic "Boston Beguine" in "New Faces" two seasons ago, gives a magnificent performance as the wife—tender, rueful, pensive and lovely.

Fortunately, Mr. Williams' "27 Wagons Full of Cotton" has been scrubbed a little since it was acted in New Orleans last winter. It is still a pretty horrifying sketch of callousness, intrigue and abomination, the characters portrayed accurately and without pity, the story told without artifice and effort.

Myron McCormick now plays the husband who swaps his wife for a good order of cotton ginning. His hearty style of playing gives the play a lighter tone than it has in the writing, and this column is offering no objections. For the truth of Jake Meighan is almost intolerably ruthless and evil. As the malignant neighbor, Felice Orlandi gives an excellent performance—reticent but venomous and cunning.

The part of the sloppy, dull-witted wife is one that could be tossed away as a type. But Maureen Stapleton is an extraordinarily gifted actress and her portrait of Flora Meighan is a little masterpiece of dramatic expression. The whole truth is there—the cheap finery caricatured by a slip that shows, the languid gestures, the shuffling walk, the weary voice. Not to forget the pain, for Flora, who looks so insensible on the surface, is a tragic woman.

As a theatre form, "All In One" is novel for Broadway. But everything in it is original and good. The writers as well as the performers are real artists.

DAILY NEWS
April 20, 1955

'All in One' a Stimulating Little Evening of Music, Drama, Dance

By JOHN CHAPMAN

An old, old song told us that every little bit added to what you got makes just a little bit more. Following this frugal but undeniably sensible theory. Broadway has recently been offering us some diversions made up of a piece of this and a piece of that, rather than the standard package made up of one whole thing. First we had, and enjoyed, "3 for Tonight," consisting of some dancing, some singing and a bit of talking. Last evening we got, at the Playhouse, an assortment called "All in One," consisting of some music, some dancing and quite a bit of solid acting.

This new theatrical potpourri is enjoyable—and stimulating, too. Its ingredients are Leonard Bernstein's musical playlet, "Trouble in Tahiti," Paul Draper's slick-and-smart dancing and Tennessee Williams' nonmusical playlet, "27 Wagons Full of Cotton." Besides being fun, all three items are worth serious attention.

An Ironic Operetta

The Bernstein work is a deft, ironic piece about life in Suburbia after love has flown out the kitchen window. Husband is bored at breakfast. Wife is petulant. Husband goes to work and gets more bored, but chirks up after work when he wins a trophy for handball at the gym. Wife mopes off to a terrible movie, then tries on some hats in a shop. When the day is done, husband and wife are back home, still bored . . . and all the while a trio of onlookers have been chanting the enchantments of life in Suburbia.

This is an interesting piece of work musically, being a clever combination of modern atonal counterpoint and plain, cheerful jazz. It is being nicely sung by John Tyers as the husband, Alice Ghostley as the wife and Constance Brigham, John Taliaferro and James Tushar as the chorus of commentators. Highlight of the score, libretto and performance is Miss Ghostley's telling, while she is in the hat shop, about the terrible movie she has seen—a thing called "Trouble in Tahiti." But she's willing to see it again with hubby after supper, because it's better than boredom at home.

Not much new can be written about Paul Draper's dancing. The wonder is that he can keep it so new. A master tap-dancer and a very agile stylist, he works with his head as well as his body. What he does, for instance, with Vincent Youmans' time-worn time-step, "Tea for Two," is a lesson in skill, invention and satire for all vaudeville hoofers.

A Cynical Playlet

The most stimulating item of the evening is Williams' little comedy about the wagons full of cotton, for it is terse, funny and cynical. In it, Maureen Stapleton reminds us that she is just about the best of our younger actresses. In what seems like a moment of playing time she creates a full character—a character who is funny and pathetic at the same time.

Miss Stapleton is the stupid wife of Myron McCormick, a coarse cotton farmer who contrives the burning of a nearby gin operated by a big syndicate. Then he blandly makes an offer to the syndicate overseer to gin the overseer's wagons full of cotton. The overseer is forced to accept the offer—but in exchange Miss Stapleton is forced to accept him.

This is good writing by Williams—alive, to the point, perceptive of character and amusing . . . because even the most pathetic of humans are amusing when they are regarded in the right perspective. McCormick and Felice Orlandi—the overseer—give good performances, and Miss Stapleton gives a brilliant one.

"Ankles Aweigh"

DAILY NEWS
April 19, 1955

Betty Kean's Low Comedy Gives 'Ankles Aweigh' a Needed Lift

By JOHN CHAPMAN

When Betty Kean is jogging, jiggling, staggering, galumphing or fooling around on the stage of the Mark Hellinger Theatre, "Ankles Aweigh" is a rowdy and lively musical because Betty is a lively and rowdy lady. The rest of this new show, which opened last evening, is noisy, brightly costumed, erratic and not very often inspired. While Jane Kean—the pretty one—carries the love songs and the love interest nicely enough, it is sister Betty who carries the evening . . . with some solid help, I hasten to add, from comedians Lew Parker and Gabriel Dell.

The plot is a podgehodge—which is a scrambled hodgepodge—about an American movie company on location in Sicily and Morocco and a U. S. aircraft carrier on location in nearby salt water. Jane, the leading lady of the movie outfit, is secretly wed to Mark Dawson, who must be the biggest jet pilot ever to squeeze into a jet plane. Before the admiral knows it—but not before you do by about 20 minutes—Jane is smuggled aboard the carrier disguised as a boy pilot.

A Varied Libretto

Things go on from there as the plot, by Guy Bolton and Eddie Davis, wanders through a Moroccan deadfall and a swanky Italian gaming joint in lackadaisical pursuit of some vast and dastardly scheme against the entire U. S. A. In this libretto I think I detect parts of such varying entertainments as "She Loves Me Not," "Sailor Beware," "Animal Crackers" and "Panama Hattie." Some of the jokes are funny, as when the villian protests that "the Mafia are a nice bunch of boys", but many of the jokes are quite elderly.

The music by Sammy Fain, and the lyrics, by Dan Shapiro, are merely serviceable, except for Miss Betty's comedy novelties and a bouncy dance number, "Headin' for the Bottom." Last night's audience, though, having perhaps a keener ear than mine, whooped and hollered over Miss Jane's and Mister Mark's singing of "Kiss Me and Kill Me With Love."

George Jenkins' setting are lovely, and Miles White's costumes are downright exciting. Or maybe it's what are inside the costumes which are exciting. The girls in "Ankles Aweigh" are extraordinarily fetching, and in the White costumes they have the new long look. I know I looked as long as I could, and as far, too. Tony Charmoli's dances are good and frisky.

But the best of the show is Betty Kean. Whether she is getting falling-down drunk or impersonating a siren with a sweater too small in a Moroccan casbah, she is wholesomely and healthily funny.

"ANKLES AWEIGH"

Musical comedy with book by Guy Bolton and Eddie Davis, music by Sammy Fain, lyrics by Dan Shapiro; staged by Fred F. Finklehoffe; dances by Tony Charmoli; scenery and lighting by George Jenkins; costumes by Miles White; presented by Howard Hoyt, Reginald Hammerstein and Mr. Finklehoffe at the Mark Hellinger Theatre, April 18, 1955. The cast:

Russ.....Ed Hanley
Cameraman.....Ray Mason
Tommy.....Bill Costin
Pizza Cart Man...Frank Conville
Elsey.....Betty Kean
Wynne.....Jane Kean
Dinky.....Lew Parker
Spud.....Gabriel Dell
Lt. Bill Kelley....Mark Dawson
Native Girl.....Nancy Walters
Capt. Zimmerman...Mark Allen
Adm. Pottles.....Will Hussung
Chipolata.....Thelma Carpenter
Joe Mancinni.....Mike Kellin
Tony.....Herb Fields
Lucia.....Betty George
Gina.....Karen Shepard
Shore Patrol.....Skeet Guenther and Jack Purcell

Daily Mirror
April 19, 1955

'Ankles Aweigh' Has Love, Laughs, Gals and Gaiety

By ROBERT COLEMAN

Howard Hoyt, Reginald Hammerstein and Fred Finklehoffe brought a raucous and rowdy musical called "Ankles Aweigh" to the Mark Hellinger Theatre Monday evening. Before we go any further, it should be reported that it was greeted with gleeful appreciation by one of the most enthusiastic first-night audiences of the season.

* * *

THE PREMIERE-ITES put callouses on their palms applauding, and shouted lustily for encores. **It was evident that a majority of those about us was having a swell time. But your reporter just couldn't share their regard for** the old-fashioned song-and-dancer, even though Betty and Jane Kean are really marvelous.

The book by Guy Bolton and Eddie Davis has to do with an American movie star making a film in Italy, having a romance on the side that results in marriage to a Naval lieutenant and trying to find a little peace and quiet for her honeymoon. She is aided and abetted by a hoydenish sister and a couple of larkish gobs.

Of course, theres' a gambling gangster bent on betraying our fleet. But you know as well as we do that our resourceful sailors are up to coping with his nefarious plots. And there's the inevitable happy ending, which is quite all right with us for we are not averse to a little happiness in this parlous world.

THE SCORE and lyrics by Sammy Fain and Dan Shapiro struck a pedestrian note on our eager eardrums. The scenery and costumes by George Jenkins and Miles White are on the gaudy side. Finklehoffe, doubling in brass as director, has gotten a lot of mileage out of a vintage vehicle.

As for the sisters Kean, they are clowns in the great tradition. Their high spirits, amazing vitality and showmanship almost make one believe their material is first-rate. Their personalities fairly crash across the footlights. They are irresistible as the movie makers who get involved in l'amour and foreign intrigue.

Mark Dawson, a manly leading man with a good, booming voice is excellent as the harassed lieutenant. Lew Parker and Gabriel Dell wring more guffaws from the script than the authors put into it. Thelma Carpenter dominates a Casbah scene with her chirping.

* * *

BUT IT IS the Keans, Betty and Jane, who romp away with the evening's honors. We particularly liked their hilarious takeoffs of husky-voiced Marlene Dietrich astride a chair, and Mary Martin flying through the air as Peter Pan. Their impish spoofing is completely captivating.

"Ankles Aweigh," in sum, is an elaborate burlesque show with love, laughs and legs, girls, gags and gaiety. Packed with talent, but tasteless. Amiable and anxious to please. Perhaps it would have been wiser had its sponsors ditched the book, and just let the Keans, Parker and Dell improvise after the fashion of the Commedia dell' Arte.

It is perplexing that so many big names should have collaborated on such a shoddy frolic. Though it has moments of merit, this juror, after weighing all the evidence, must vote a regretful "no."

New York World-Telegram and The Sun

April 19, 1955

Sister Team Packs Load In 'Ankles'

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

"Ankles Aweigh" is a noisy, sumptuous and amiable show which seems to belong in some other era.

It delves into every known musical comedy plot twist ever invented. A movie star is working in Italy. Her new husband is a naval officer.

She is disguised as a sailor, discovered on the carrier by the admiral, lands in Morocco and catches several spies along the way.

After two hours and 20 minutes of this, somebody decides to say it is all a satire. This afterthought is too late.

It has been a long time since Broadway had a sister team to toast. Betty and Jane Kean fill the bill in fine shape. They are both handsome and gifted.

Night Club Air.

In "Ankles Aweigh," though, they have not been guided very happily away from the night club atmosphere where they have been sensationally successful. In fact, this musical seems more of an act than a show. Except for about 10 minutes all told, one or both of the girls is onstage.

They are so eager to please that they never let you relax. The sound apparatus is deafening.

With their material framed and pruned, they can be as big in a show as they ever are in clubs.

Betty has an inspired moment imitating Mary Martin, but it's ruined with a lyric. However, she is entirely winning in a sly song about a honeymoon. Jane gets her biggest hand with "Kill Me With Love," sung in varied rhythms with Mark Dawson as her handsome Navy husband.

Chins Up.

Lew Parker, who is well known to be very funny, and Gabriel Dell, who proves here he can be, are poorly served by their material. They keep their chins up with some mighty strange jokes, even when hiding under ladies' beds.

Thelma Carpenter has one blues number with which she halted the performance last night. Betty George wanders around looking incredibly beautiful and speaking with an incredible accent.

Miles White has dressed the show so it looks as if every girl in it had the choice of her lifetime dress to wear.

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

April 19, 1955

THEATER

'Ankles Aweigh'

By WALTER F. KERR

SOME of us have been campaigning lately for a return to the old-fashioned, slam-bang, gags-and-girls musical comedy. Some of us ought to be shot.

As the Hellinger curtain goes up on a vast canvas of tattooed gams and popeyed sailors, you realize at once that "Ankles Aweigh" is not going to be a distinguished musical play. It is not even going to try. And you are a little hopeful—maybe, for a second or so, very hopeful.

• • •

A line of absolutely dazzling show girls stalks out, hesitates for inspection, and stalks off. You pick a couple to notice again, the next time round. You remember that this once was fun. The dancers on stage begin to grab their toes and spin meaninglessly—the boys at this moment are dressed in pink, purple, and chartreuse trousers, white jackets, and polka-dot scarves—and you guess that it might be amusing to have the dances non-integrated for a change. The singers in the front line drop to their knees at the footlights, wave their arms wildly, and roar so vociferously that you can't tell what the lyrics are—let alone whether they are good or bad. A pony parade in sailor caps and baggy blouses prances from the wings, precision-style. Everything brings back memories of an irresponsible, irrepressible, gay-as-all-get-out time.

• • •

But before you can say "Lollobrigida"—some one does say "Lollobrigida" and some one else says "Lollobrigida is falling down"—a chill wind begins to blow through the Piazza at Montefino.

• • •

Comedy, in the guise of a movie star, her stand-in, and three sailors, has come to Montefino. (Montefino is, I guess, in Sicily). The stand-in remarks that Godfrey has just fired Eisenhower and that Ed Sullivan has hired him. A sailor volunteers that he has been around the world eight times and Brooklyn twice. Another sailor showing an Admiral into his quarters on shipboard announces that "It's really a lot of bunk." When a French Moroccan conspirator rolls drunkenly off stage with a bottle of rum under his arm, somebody glances after him and sneers, "Rummy-o and Juliet." Librettists Guy Bolton and Eddie Davis have not made the wise-cracking kind of musical seem very wise.

The lyrics, from the hand—the left hand—of Dan Shapiro, do not represent a stunning improvement over the book. A Cole Porter-type catalogue called "Nothing Can Replace a Man" may be the most literal listing of prosaic facts I have ever run across in a song-and-dance show. An intended rouser called "Headin' for the Bottom Blues" ought, perhaps, to have been called "The-not-to-be-distinguished-from-any-other-blues-Blues." And a "His and Hers" item, done perfectly straight, works "slippers near the chair," "roses everywhere," "home, sweet, home," and "I can't give you diamond rings or fancy furs" into the same jam-packed little refrain. Sammy Fain's music for all this has a certain brassy vitality, but no really saving distinction.

• • •

Betty and Jane Kean are the girls who wrestle with the sailors, the dialogue, and the muffled laughter out front. (Jane is the pretty one, Betty is the funny one.)

Of the two, I think Jane comes off best. As the movie star who must be smuggled (in sailor clothes) aboard the U. S. S. Alamo, she does finally get to wear some pleasantly traditional Miles White costumes, and the number that stopped the show last night—"Kiss Me and Kill Me With Love"—was hers.

Sister Betty is a bit of a problem. There's a fine spirit there, and you feel you'd like the girl if she ever stopped long enough to plan any of her effects. Quite often something she starts to do promises to be good fun—as in a flat-footed soubrette walk she tries on for "Honeymoon"—but the first thing you know the gesture is blurred, the attack veers, and the precise target is missed. Miss Kean's throwaway technique also seems to me much too prodigal: some of her lines obviously ought to be thrown away, but if you throw away everything equally, can you ever land anything?

• • •

Lew Parker and Gabriel Dell fight valiantly to wring hysteria out of routines in which they try to slip a scoundrel a mickey, conceal themselves under a double bed, or improvise a jam session with invisible instruments. They are good men, unjustly detained. Mark Dawson beams broadly and sings lustily as the romantic lead.

Somewhere past the middle of the evening the authors slip in a pretense that they're kidding, that satire is what they have in mind. But I don't think they should be allowed to make this plea. They have discredited a noble form.

New York Post

April 19, 1955

By Richard Watts Jr.

The Show's Name Is 'Ankles Aweigh'

On behalf of "Ankles Aweigh," I'll say that anyone who goes to a show with a name like that has been sufficiently warned. He has only himself to blame. It may even be what he wants. There's certainly no deception about it, because the new musical comedy, which opened last night at the Mark Hellinger Theater, behaves exactly like something called "Ankles Aweigh." Unless, however, you look upon the title as an impudent and refreshing pun, you may agree with me that the "entertainment" bearing it is exceedingly depressing, whether intended as satirical or straight.

It is, of course, possible that there is room for another musical show which shuns the current sophistications of the school and leaps back nostalgically to a simpler and more innocent day. The great and justified success of "The Boy Friend" would clearly indicate this. But that delightful paraphrase of the girl-and-music extravaganzas of the twenties has charm, skill and humor. My impression of "Ankles Aweigh" is that it has neither the brightness and wit to be satisfying as satire or the charm to be winning as nostalgia.

Two Jokes

Not that it doesn't try hard to be funny. There are four comics present, two female and two male, and it can't be said of them that they are unwilling to work. And there are a lot of jokes, such as the one in which a sailor known as "Dinky" is mistakenly called "Stinky." Then there was the occasion when the humor grew a little cryptic for me. "How did you get to Morocco?" asks one card of another. To which the reply, quick as a flash, was: "I changed at Canal Street." At the risk of being accused of lacking a sense of humor, I confess I didn't get it.

The libretto, which seems to have been remembered by Guy Bolton and Eddie Davis rather than written, does contain plot. There is an American film star, making a movie in Italy, and there is an American naval officer, to whom she is secretly married. The two comic sailors smuggle her aboard his ship, and there is also some good, old-fashioned hiding under beds. There is likewise a spy conspiracy of rather mysterious proportions, an attempt by a villain and villainess to frame the young officer. I thought it was familiar without being comical.

Songs and Stars

The music by Sammy Fain and the lyrics by Dan Shapiro are pleasant enough, without being much more than amiably reminiscent. I thought the two most attractive songs were the ones called "Nothing at All" and "Walk Like a Sailor." Tony Charmoli has staged a few lively dances, and the production is properly colorful. Things move along vigorously enough, and Betty and Jane Kean, the show's stars, are friendly, industrious and enterprising young women, but it all seemed like the revival of an ancient musical show not worth reviving.

The two comic sailors are played by Lew Parker and Gabriel Dell, who are almost as as hard-working as the stars, which is saying a lot. Mark Dawson sings agreeably as the dashing young officer, and Mike Kellin is the comic villain. Then there are two handsome girls, Betty George, who is the villainess, and Thelma Carpenter, who sings a song. Indeed, everyone in the company is industrious. I assuredly didn't enjoy "Ankles Aweigh," but I would be the last to claim it was trying to deceive anybody.

Journal American

April 19, 1955

Musical Is A Bit Dated

Players Strive Commendably But Book Lets Them Down

By JOHN McCLAIN

THE title of the new musical which opened at the Hellinger Theatre last night is "Ankles Aweigh," and I guess that should have been the tip-off. You can imagine the moment when the writers and the producers were sitting in a smoke-filled room; they had a script but they didn't have a title.

Finally one of them jumped up and said, "Fellas, I've got it! It's a story about the Navy and there are a lot of girls in it. Let's call it 'Ankles Aweigh'." The fact that nobody objected to this or was able to improve upon it should be some indication of what was to follow, for it is an expression of the depth of humor and ingenuity of the whole evening.

This is meant to be a real old-time girlie show, with big sets, bright music and a pleasant workable plot that will keep things in motion. What emerges, however, is something too banal to have the charm of nostalgia, too corny for modern standards.

Clinging Tune

The girls are there all right—the best of the season thus far—and there is an occasionally clinging tune; the settings and costumes are attractive. But the humor is deplorable.

There were times when it was almost impossible to tell whether the actors were kidding the material or vice versa. As in the case of "The Boy Friend," which never takes itself seriously, I felt these people were on the brink of a quite hilarious caricature. Are they serious with "Kiss Me And Kill Me With Love," for instance? I still don't know.

The actual plot of "Ankles" defies definition. An American movie queen is on location in Italy and is secretly married to a lieutenant in the U. S. Navy who is conveniently on duty in the neighborhood. There are the two comical gobs and the stern Admiral and the gangling sister. There also is a giant misunderstanding about how the heroine is smuggled aboard ship, and the threat that the hero may be court martialed as a result.

Injected into the midst of all this are numbers like "Italy," the genesis of which is that this ain't such a bad country but Hollywood's better. Then there's a quite appealing ballad called "Nothing at All;" a strange but effective ballet set in a casino, "Ready Cash;" and the high point of the evening, an all-male dance number, "The Code," bearing little or no relationship with the rest of the proceedings.

Limited by Plot

Betty and Jane Kean are performers of stature and experience, capable of demolishing night club audiences from coast to coast, but here they are limited by dreary plot jokes and routines below the level of their act. Jane can still sell a song and Betty can clown, but much of their usual spontaneity was missing.

I felt sorry for Mark Dawson; he spent the whole evening in a white Navy uniform, doing his best to be rugged and hearty, yet preoccupied with the songs (which he sings very well) and the curious vagaries of the plot, which must be as baffling to him as to most of the customers.

Lew Parker and Gabriel Dell were as funny as possible as the two sailors, which wasn't very funny; Thelma Carpenter delivered one pretty good number, and Betty George was sultry and seductive in an incomprehensible sorceress role.

Everybody hoped "Ankles Aweigh" would be a good old-fashioned frolic. The truth seems to be that it is just old-fashioned, period.